

SAME OLD, SAME OLD: FROM BORING TO CREATIVE PRESENTATION

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ABSTRACT

This study compares attitudes of tertiary-level students in Australia and Bangladesh towards the use of technology in lectures and seminars. Students were shown audiovisual recordings of two seminars. The content and teacher in both seminars were identical. One seminar, however, used a PowerPoint presentation package while the other used usual whiteboard–marker pen, and post-it notes as additional tools for the presentation. Findings from the research suggest that both Australian and Bangladeshi students preferred the audiovisual recording without PowerPoint as it was more effective and interactive to them. These findings have important implications with respect to educational planning and effectiveness of modern technology in making presentations in both of these countries.

Key words: Multimedia, teaching, presentation, Australia, Bangladesh.

I. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the use of technology in education has seriously challenged traditional teaching and learning. Teachers are encouraged to look for a teaching method that is based on information and communication technology (ICT) (Arani, 2006) [1]. Contemporary classroom presentations and seminars are conducted using PowerPoint packages and multimedia. These presentation packages give presenters an opportunity to pull audiovisual clips, animation and colourful pictures together on to the same screen with a simple click on the mouse. A little practice, and a balanced use of the slides and video-animations can make presentations lively, stimulating, engaging, and fun (Lamb 1992) [2]. On the other hand, Janssens (1977) [3] comments that successful learning depends on students' ability, interest, and motivation of the students. It is often true that viewers of these multimedia presentations pay attention to the fascinating PowerPoint slides in the beginning of the presentation. However, they may lose their interest. PowerPoint packages are attractive but often not

effective for presentations in classrooms and seminars.

This research paper has been compiled based on the results derived from comparing the attitudes of some Australian students and Bangladeshi students toward the use of PowerPoint packages in teaching presentations. Suggestions for improving presentations have come from the participants' responses.

II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In 1987, Robert Gaskins had invented PowerPoint 1.0 for Mac computers. Later in the 1990s Microsoft had released their version of PowerPoint for the Windows (Spring 2007) [4]. Halal and Liebowitz ridiculed the traditions of modern education that "today's typical college classroom is archaic: the only thing that distinguishes it from the classroom of the medieval university is an overhead projector" (Halal & Liebowitz 1994, 25) [5]. While their observation makes sense, they did not get the point that it is useful to use an OHP (or

multimedia in later years) when you are dealing with a large classroom and you want to give information in a short time. Pictures from a textbook or exercises can be easily copied onto an OHP transparency sheet for showing the students to practise in the classroom. These tasks and many others can be completed with the traditional chalk and blackboard only less effectively and would be time-consuming.

In a developing country such as Bangladesh, government and rural educational institutions have small budgets. They do not have multimedia for classroom presentations. At best, they might have an overhead projector and a few computers in the computer laboratories for students to use. On the other hand, private universities, which charge high fees from students, have many of the facilities needed for modern classroom presentations. In the institutions where technology is not available, teachers resort to traditional lecture mode of teaching to make classrooms lively and interesting.

Patty (2007) [6] notes in *The Sydney Morning Herald*, Professor Sweller from the University of New South Wales, Australia, developed the “cognitive load theory” in the 1980’s. According to his theory, human brain’s working memory is only limited for learning a new information. If information is saved in the long-term memory; it can be brought back to the working memory for use; information delivered in the classroom cannot be retained fully without the audience taking notes or the presenter distributing handouts. PowerPoint presentations may backfire if the information on the screen is repeated by the presenter as the audience’s attention will be divided between the two. Professor Sweller observed that “The use of the PowerPoint presentation has been a disaster. It should be ditched” (UNSW conference briefing 2007) [7].

If I could un-invent one software programme, it would be PowerPoint. Without exception, the worst presentations, lectures, and budget briefings I attend are conducted using this tragic package. Presenters break all the rules of public speaking— repeating verbatim the words on the screen; letting the technology determine the pace and order of the presentation, and even requiring a darkened room. Also, many of these presentations either do not run, or begin late, because of “problems with the technology”.

(Brabazon 2002, 16) [8]

Often students miss a few points of the presentation and want access to the slides. They then have a chance to copy points exactly as the teacher has provided. It blocks the ways of critical thinking for students. It adds on an extra workload on the teacher who has to plan the lecture and slides accordingly. Only a few of the teachers can carry on smoothly with their lectures if PowerPoint does not work because of electricity cut out or technological faults. People think that teaching is a very easy job, as someone has to stand in front of the class and give lectures, or in the present scenario, upload his lectures to the institutional website. Brabazon pointed out that an academic life has four pillars such as teaching, research, administration, and community service. Implementing new technologies have changed these areas in a teacher’s life in both a positive and a negative way. In 1993, Bates (as cited in Brabazon 2002, 43) had conducted a survey among American students and asked them about how they feel about the use of technology in teaching. He said:

Have a look at the answers to the following student survey questions:

- What advice would you give to teaching staff planning to create a web-based learning course?
- Don’t disregard the human factor for tutorials and labs.
- *Use it as a tool but do not use it as the only means of communication-maintain
- Word-of-mouth explanations as central to the course.
- Make it easy to follow and colourful; make it interesting so people stay attentive.
- Think about the students first and from the students’ perspective. You are a teacher first.
- You have to be enthusiastic about what you are doing.

It is clear from his survey that students expect more contribution from the teacher’s side. If a teacher only reads from the PowerPoint slides, students tend to think that the teacher is not giving enough effort to make the lesson clear to them. They prefer a teacher who would explain the terms and lessons to them rather than reading out from the screen. David Byrne in a lecture on Art, Technology, and Culture Colloquium at UC Berkeley (as cited in Ganahl 2005) [9], said that most PowerPoint presentations are often filled with “irrelevant,

gaudy, and vacuous graphics that take the place of actual content.” He did not blame PowerPoint package for this and said that it is the era of the modern age where we are used to see TV news with graphics and icons. Mayer (2001) does not want to call PowerPoint a method. Instead, he calls it a medium that can be used effectively with proper design methods. Professor Tufte (as cited in Arndt 2007) [10] in his book *Cognitive Style of PowerPoint* mocked at PowerPoint presentation as it overlooks the content and overloads the slides with “chart junk”, “overproduced logotypes”, “branding and corny clipart” etc. Atkinson (2004) [11] pointed out that as PowerPoint makes it possible to project written words on screen, presenters often do not think how the words in the slides would sound like and put it in the slides. Spoken words are of course different from the written words on screen. He added that even though PowerPoint has reduced the torment of squinting to look at unclear text on blackboard, the audience’s gaze was now fixed on the screen. They have to concentrate on the slides and listen to the speaker at the same time, which is burdensome for them in a way. He appreciates the fact that the audience has the privilege to get the handouts of the PowerPoint so that they can read it later for a better understanding, most of which go straight to the bin (Atkinson 2004). If the presenter repeats from the screen, it creates boredom and “hurt in understanding”.

Teaching is often judged by two things, what a teacher does in the classroom and the result of the students or what have been achieved. In fact, it is “an art and a craft, formulated to communicate, create, and critique ideas and ideologies” (Brabazon 2002, 35). The screen of PowerPoint hinders the communication between the teacher and students to some extent. Body movements and gestures, eye contact with the audience is vital in making an effective presentation (Hillman 1999) [12].

There are three modes of technology for education. i) Technologies for presentation- e.g. Word processing, print and scanning; ii) Technologies for interaction-e.g. Media presentation packages as PowerPoint and iii) Technologies for communication-e.g. mechanism for interaction, dialogue and feedback. Through the third stage, a negotiation between text and audience takes place and a movement in power relationship between the teacher and students occur. Learning does not

happen unless all the three modes are activated (Brabazon 2002). This is one reason why PowerPoint results into becoming a mere shining screen in a dark room rather than making the audience learn something. The darkened room makes students sleepy during long lectures of class with PowerPoint presentations.

Presenters should think of different ways of making presentations successful. In a developing country such as Bangladesh where educational technology is rarely in use in rural areas, presentation can be made interactive through other means. De Bono’s (1967) [13] theory of lateral thinking can be worth looking into for this purpose. He says that one should first look at the available alternative ways and if there is none, he should go for thinking about new ones. It is extremely difficult to stop and look for alternatives when there is no hold-up and no need of alternatives. He mentions this in the following ways:

Simple focus: the willingness to focus on some thing that is not a problem in order to find alternative ideas.

Creative pause: the pause to look for alternatives even when there is no need.

Challenge: the willingness to challenge uniqueness and to see if there might be alternative ways of doing something

Continuity of neglect: things continue to be done in the same way because there was never any reason to look for alternatives.

(De Bono 1992, 120-121)

III. Objectives of the Research

The main objective of the present work is to compare perceptions of tertiary-level students of Australia and Bangladesh on the use of technology in lectures and seminars. It is guided by two specific research questions:

- 1) Which technique of presentation is preferred by the Australian and Bangladeshi students, with PowerPoint or without it?
- 2) What are the reasons behind one teaching technique being preferred more than the other?

IV. SIGNIFICANCE

This research looks into the factors behind ineffective presentations. These findings will be useful for both the teachers and students in

designing their lesson plans and presentations by using technology of without using it.

V. METHODOLOGY

The Instrument:

- i) *Video clips:* For conducting this research two demonstration classes were taken by the researcher herself. The content of both the classes was Global Warming. Clip-1 had the use of PowerPoint slides with information on global warming and two colourful pictures. In Clip-2, the teacher had used white board and marker pen with a combination of post-it notes for the students to participate. The video camera shot was only fixed on the teacher so that it captures the presentation technique accurately.

- ii) *Questionnaires for Bangladeshi students:*

Two types of questionnaires were used to collect data from Bangladesh. Three people were selected by the researcher as per convenience of communication to conduct the survey on behalf of her. The surveyor of University of Dhaka was a student and the other two surveyors were teachers of the selected private universities. Questionnaire-1 had instructions for the surveyors to write down the ratio of students' preference between the two video clips (see appendix-1). It had some questions to generate a group discussion among the students on why they had chosen a particular video clip. Questionnaire-2 was given to the surveyors for asking a cohort of 10 volunteers from the total participants to describe three best and worst things about both the video clips (see appendix-2). This questionnaire was not given to all the participants because it would have been time-consuming and inconvenient for the surveyors to type the responses from a large number of participants. A response sheet was sent to the surveyors to write down the responses to the items in questionnaire-2 and send it back to the researcher. The surveyors were communicated via email.

- iii. *Questionnaire for Australian students:*

This questionnaire was administered to the Australian participants after they had watched

the video (see appendix-3). It was designed to gather in-depth information as it gave them a chance to show which clip they considered better along with three best and worst things about the videos in their consideration and further suggestions.

The Participants:

Demo clip-1 and clip-2 were shown to 36 Australian students at Curtin University of Technology and 65 Bangladeshi students from University of Dhaka, BRAC University and Eastern University. Of the three Bangladeshi universities the first is publicly-funded while the other two are privately run. The respondents were selected from the tertiary level of study, more specifically from the English Departments of these three universities, as it was convenient for the surveyors to contact them. Moreover, as adult learners, they would be able to critically evaluate both the audiovisual clips.

The Australian participants were students from different disciplines of study such as Journalism, Architecture, Health Promotion, Education, Psychology etc. at Curtin University of Technology as it was convenient for the researcher to contact them easily.

Demographic Characteristics

<i>Nationalities</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
Bangladeshi	65	64.36
Australian	36	35.64
Total	101	100

Procedure:

Participants were not told the fact that one clip was with PowerPoint and the other one was without so that they do not get influenced by pronounced independent variables and produce a biased response. They were made aware of the fact that the teacher and the content of the clips were constant in both the clips so that they can focus on analysing the teaching techniques accurately. The participants were given the questionnaires after watching clip-1 and clip-2. The transition from clip-1 (with PowerPoint) to clip-2 (without PowerPoint) was used as a snack-break when they were given chocolates as incentives.

Method of Analysis:

The data of the research was coded with Inductive data analysis from ethnographic action research while “in-vivo” data coding were used for analyzing it.

VI. DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

The survey was conducted among 101 participants. 72 of the participants preferred clip-2 (without PowerPoint) and 29 participants chose clip-1 (with PowerPoint). The following pie chart shows the percentage of the participants' preference. 71% participant preferred presentation without PowerPoint and 29% of them preferred presentation with PowerPoint.

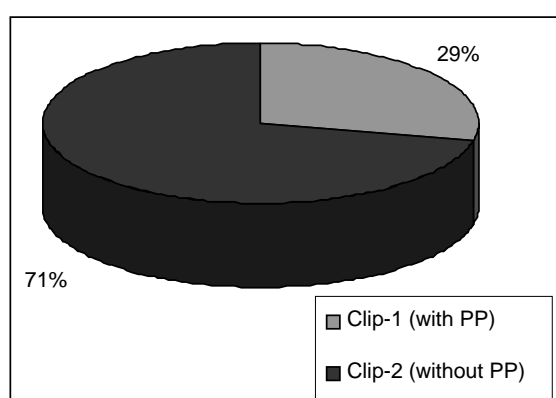


Figure 1: Preference of the participants (%)

51 Bangladeshi participants chose Clip-2 while 43 Bangladeshi students chose clip-1, and 21 Australian students chose clip-2 while 15 Australian students chose clip-1 as the best one.

Some of the reasons behind choosing Clip-1 as the best technique were “It is more organized, and professional”, “students can concentrate more”, “Less time consuming” “students can see things in front of them and remember them”, “It uses the latest technology and therefore more attractive, interesting and colourful”, “authentic images are used”, “it is informative and easy to understand”, “visually stimulating” and “convenient for the teacher to utilize time in discussing the lesson more”.

Some of the reasons behind choosing the presentation without PowerPoint were, “It has more participation from the students,” “It is more interactive”, “It is interesting”, “It involves

physical movements and activities” “More student centred”, “it is engaging and interesting,” and “Easy to understand.”

The participants were asked to find out three best and worst features of both the techniques. They pointed out these features as prominent:

Table: List of features of both the techniques of presentation

Colourful and Graphic
Clear
Easy to Understand
Interactive
Engaging
Interesting/Fun
Organized
Students' Participation
Good for Large Audience
Teacher Centred
Professional
Restricted Movement
Working in Groups
Teacher Facing the Students
Time Consuming and Slow
Involvement of the teacher
Humour and relaxed environment
Easy Download
Convenient
Boring
Old Fashioned
Modern
Challenging for the teacher

Most of the participants noted that the presentation with PowerPoint was “colourful” (20%), “clear”, (17%) and “easy to understand” (11%), while the rest of the participants said that presentation without PowerPoint was not colourful, clear, and easy to understand.

A large number of respondents (33%) said that clip-2 which is presentation without PowerPoint was more “interactive” and more “engaging” (25%) than the other one. Even though 36% of the respondents thought that the technique of clip-2 was “time consuming and slow”, they admitted that it is more “interesting” (14%) than the other technique. Only 8% of the respondents thought that presentation with PowerPoint is “engaging” and “interesting” while 11% thought that the technique of clip-1 is “boring”. About 14% thought that presentation technique without PowerPoint was more interesting.

37% of the respondents thought that clip-2's technique ensured students' participation in it while 32.67% of them thought that it was more interactive than the presentation without PowerPoint. On the other hand, 13.86% of the participants found the presentation with PowerPoint "interactive" and only 10% found "students' participation" prominent in that technique.

11% of the respondents thought that the presentation with PowerPoint "restricts movement of the teacher" in classroom, but it is good for "professional/formal" presentation (0.99%) and "larger audience" (3%). 7% of the respondents said that the presentation with PowerPoint is more "teacher centred" and the teacher can control the class as he/she "faces the students". On the other hand, the same proportion (7%) of the respondents said that even though the presentation without PowerPoint is "less organized" than the other technique, it has more scope for implementing "group work" for the students and bringing in "humour and relaxed environment" in the classroom. 14% of the respondents liked the use of "modern" technology in clip-1 while 9% thought that the technique of clip-2 is "old fashioned". 7.92% respondent admitted that the technique in clip-2 might be "challenging for the teacher" as he/she has to draw and talk at the same time while 3% respondents found PowerPoint slides "convenient" as the teacher can see the text right in front and concentrate more on the lecture. 6.93% respondents said that they liked the fact that PowerPoint slides are "easily downloadable" after class for backing up their self study at home. In some of the response sheets, both the clips had overlaps in the themes of "interesting", "easy to understand", "interactive", "student's participation", and "colourful". Some of the minor themes of the data are given in the chart in Appendix-4.

VII. LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

It was observed that the participants could understand the technique of clip-2 (without PowerPoint) easily compared to clip-1 because they had already been familiarized with the content of the video. This may have had some influence on some of the participants in selecting clip-2 as the best. One or two respondents analyzed the topic of discussion and the speaking style of the teacher in the video even though they were told that the

content and the teacher are fixed variables and they should concentrate on the technique of presentation only. Initial trial of looking at difference of responses of the male and female participants was difficult to conduct in Bangladesh as the required equal number of male and female participants could not be matched. Male participants were fewer than the female participants. That is why the research focused on the responses of all students in general.

VIII. DISCUSSION AND FUTURE DIRECTION

Most of the Australian respondents recommended that they would prefer a combination of both PowerPoint presentation and blackboard or interactive activities. Bangladeshi respondents said the same thing with an added suggestion to add some more question answering and activities into the lesson. Respondents appreciated the fact that PowerPoint can be downloaded easily to back up memorizing or understanding the lesson with a hint that the process may make a student lazy and kill his/her creativity. They suggested that the presentation without PowerPoint should have handouts for the students.

Even though presentation without PowerPoint is not organized, time consuming and less colourful; majority of the students found it most interesting, engaging, participatory, and found more of personal involvement from the teacher that makes the students feel secure that the teacher will always be there to help them. On the other hand, PowerPoint presentations were suggested to be used for formal seminars and large audience as it looks more professional and takes less time. The respondents noticed that the teacher's movement in the presentation with PowerPoint was restricted and it made her look as if there was no personal touch from her side. In the other presentation, the teacher could move around the classroom to check students' works and contribute more in giving real-time feedbacks. These responses reflect Hillman's (1999) point that a successful presentation involves body movement, gestures, and eye contact. Both the presentations had group discussions, but students coming in front to the board added more participation from their side and made the class interactive in the second presentation without PowerPoint.

Tripathi (2008) as well as Brabazon (2002) thinks that modern technology is overshadowing the

Socratic way of teaching nowadays (Tripathi 2008, 6)[14]. Today almost every university around the world has a variety of distance learning and online courses to offer to students. Often PowerPoint slides are submitted to the teacher via email to as an assessment task. How can a teacher mark that PowerPoint slides without even listening to the students' delivery speed and looking at the standing posture or body gestures? Video conferencing is used in some of the universities in the West, but it is very expensive and not available in the institutions of the developing countries.

Overhead Projectors or PowerPoint presentations often creates boredom for the students if there are too many of slides in the presentation. Moreover, often the Projector and OHP do not work in the classroom and everyone has to wait for the technician of the institution to come and solve it. Only a few teachers can carry on with their lecture without the transparencies and PowerPoint slides in such situation. In a PowerPoint presentation, almost everyone grows a habit of looking at the screen and repeating what is written on them. Some of the respondents of this research admitted that they do not go to such lectures. Moreover, they can download the slides from the university website to study at home. Respondents pointed out that PowerPoint makes students lazy because they do not want to read books and stick to the point of the lecture slides only.

Group presentations, competitive group presentations or role-plays among students, paper scraps, games related to the topic of the lesson, more question answers and activities can make presentation in classroom interactive and interesting. It is better to involve the audience in discussion in a presentation.

IX CONCLUSION

One of the participants in the video clip joined in the discussion after the shooting. She preferred clip-2 (without PowerPoint) and commented

“Often coffee helps me to stay awake in the dark room of PowerPoint presentations... there is no point in attending class if the teacher only repeats the text of the screen. We can download it from online blackboard any time.”

This research shows that PowerPoint presentation is not liked even in a developed country like

Australia where almost all presentations are conducted with the software. This does not necessarily mean that presentation with PowerPoint will always be a failure. It culminates into a failure when the presenters do not follow the rules of making PowerPoint presentation. Success of a presentation depends mostly on the presenters' enthusiasm, technique, and proper delivery of the topic. In education, students want more involvement from the teacher. Group works and pair works in class have been there for a long time, but they were overshadowed by the use of modern presentation packages. It is a trial to bring back the lost teacher in classroom who should makes students participate creatively in tasks rather than giving a long speech to the students like an *Avatar* hanging on the modern World Wide Web. Introducing an Avatar teacher in the second life or cyberspace is the newest experimentation. A lot of analyzing is required how classroom presentation would be conducted in this case.

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APPENNDICES

Appendix-1

Questionnaire-1 for the cohort of 50-70 students from Bangladesh

(The surveyor will ask questions to the viewers and fill this out form)

A

Name of the Institution:

Name of the Department:

Year of the students (e.g. Undergrad or M.A.)

Average age of the students:

B

Total number of students in the classroom:

Total number of boys in the classroom:

Total number of girls in the classroom:

C

(More of a discussion with the viewers is expected here where they can express their opinions freely.

Q.1. Look at these two classes. What are the differences between the two videos?

Q.2. Both the videos teach the same thing.

Which one did you like most? People who prefer the first clip, please raise your hands.

Count of total raised hands:

Count of boys raising hands:

Count of girls raising hands:

Q.2. Why do you prefer this class?

All the reasons given by the students must be written down (on a separate sheet of paper if required).

*

*

*

Q.3. People who prefer the first clip, please raise your hands.

Count of total raised hands:

Count of boys raising hands:

Count of girls raising hands:

Q.4. Why do you prefer this class?

Reasons given by the students must be written down (on a separate sheet of paper if required). (And the differences of responses expressed by the boys and girls have to be observed as gender difference is a variable here.)

*

*

Appendix-2

Questionnaire-2

(for the cohort of 10 students)

(Students will write the answers individually)

Ratio: 5 female students, and 5 male students (10 photocopies of this sheet has to be distributed)

Name of the student:

Name of the Institution: (e.g. DU, NSU):

Please write three best things about Clip-1:

1)

2)

3)

Please write three worst things about Clip-1:

1)

2)

3)

Please write three best things about Clip-2:

1)

2)

3)

Please write three worst things about Clip-2:

1)

2)

3)

Any other suggestion how presentations can be improved?

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.....
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.....
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.....
.....

Thank you for your time

Appendix-3

Questionnaire-3

(for Australian Participants)

Name:

Name of the course: (e.g. MA in Journalism)

Email:

Contact number:

Which video clip did you like most? Write in a line why you like it.

a) Clip-1 b) Clip- 2

Please write three best things about Clip-1:

1)

2)

3)

Please write three worst things about Clip-1:

1)

2)

3)

Please write three best things about Clip-2:

1)

2)

3)

Please write three worst things about Clip-2:

1)

2)

3)

Any other suggestion how presentations can be improved?

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.....
.....

Thank you for your time.

Appendix-4

Themes	Clip1 (PowerPoint)				Clip2 (Without PowerPoint)			
	Aus (n)	Bang (n)	Total (n)	Total (%)	Aus (n)	Bang (n)	Total (n)	Total (%)
Colourful and Graphic	15	5	20	19.85	3	1	4	3.96
Adequate Visual Aids	4	8	12	11.88	6	0	6	5.94
Adequate Information	5	3	8	7.92	2	2	4	3.96
Clear	14	3	17	16.83	0	2	2	1.98
Easy to Understand	9	2	11	10.89	5	2	7	6.93
Easy to Remember	5	3	8	7.92	2	0	2	1.98
Interactive	8	6	14	13.86	17	16	33	32.67
Engaging	6	2	8	7.92	18	8	26	25.74
Interesting/Fun	5	3	8	7.92	5	9	14	13.86
Organized	4	10	14	13.86	7	0	7	6.93
Students' Participation	9	1	10	9.90	20	17	37	36.63
Messy	0	0	0	0	2	1	3	2.97
Large Audience	2	1	3	2.97	0	0	0	0
Teacher Centred	1	6	7	6.93	2	0	2	1.98
Professional	5	5	10	0.99	0	0	0	0
Restricted Movement	6	5	11	10.89	0	0	0	0
Working in Groups	2	0	2	1.98	7	0	7	6.93
Teacher Faces Students	4	3	7	6.93	0	0	0	0
Time Consuming and Slow	3	0	3	2.97	10	16	36	35.64
Involvement of the teacher	0	2	2	1.98	10	2	12	11.88
Humour and relaxed environment	0	0	0	0	3	4	7	6.93
Easy to get after class	5	2	7	6.93	0	0	0	0
Convenient	0	3	3	2.97	1	0	1	0.99
Effective	1	1	2	1.98	1	3	4	3.96
Boring	6	5	11	10.98	5	1	6	5.94
Old Fashioned	0	0	0	0	3	6	9	8.91
Modern Technology	4	10	14	13.86	0	0	0	0
Challenging for the teacher	0	2	2	1.98	0	8	8	7.92
Good Teaching Technique	4	2	6	5.94	6	1	7	6.93
Realtime Action	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0.99
Making students lazy	1	0	1	0.99	0	0	0	0
Motivating	1	0	1	0.99	1	0	1	0.99
Getting Feedback Easily	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0.99